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AUTHOR Seligman, Richard; Hanson, Alan
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ABSTRACT

The parents of all students at the University of California in Los Angeles under the age of 21 were mailed a questionnaire to determine their attitudes toward a proposed visitation policy which, in essence, would remove all University imposed restrictions on visitation hours. The residents of each floor would determine the hours during which visitation would be permitted. Of the 1,410 usable responses, nearly two-thirds opposed the proposed expansion of visitation privileges. At the same time, however, less than 10% of the responding parents indicated that they would go so far as to refuse to allow their child to live in the halls under the proposed policy. A copy of the survey and the text of the explanatory cover letter which accompanied it are included. (TL)

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PARENTAL ATTITUDES ON RESIDENCE HALL VISITATION POLICY

Richard Seligman
Acting Director
Center for the Study of Evaluation
University of California, Los Angeles

Alan Hanson
Associate Dean of Students
Housing Services
University of California, Los Angeles

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Visitation in campus residence halls is a topic familiar to most college and university administrators. Current policies and practices, when compared with those which existed only a few years ago, show a general trend toward increased visitation between men and women students with fewer restrictions on the time, place, and manner in which visitation is permitted. Surveys initiated by the Research and Information Committee of the Association of College and University Housing Offices reveal this trend in successive studies during the years 1967-1970 (ACUHO, 1967-1970).

At the outset, we should like to set forth our definition of "visitation." In this study the term is used to mean "the practice of allowing members of the opposite sex, at the invitation of a resident, to visit that resident in his or her dormitory room during specified hours." In the spring of 1970 considerable pressure from students and staff was directed at top level student personnel administrators to make major changes in the visitation policy for the UCLA residence halls. The remainder of this paper describes a research study which was commissioned by the Dean of Students Office in connection with this matter.

A brief review of the manner in which other institutions have responded to the demands for "liberalized" visitation policies revealed that students, faculty, and administrators are commonly consulted; the notion of consulting parents has apparently been avoided. Since parents are required to sign the residence hall contracts of students under twenty-one years of age, administrators at UCLA reasoned that their views on the question of visitation policies should be solicited prior to making significant changes in such policies.

Seeking the reactions of parents on the question of visitation had a dual purpose. First, it provided the University with an opportunity to inform parents of present conditions with respect to visitation. Second, it provided parents an opportunity to voice their opinions prior to the implementation of a new policy. Thus the survey acted as a two-way communications medium. It served the functions of information dissemination as well as information collection. By their analysis of the results of the survey, administrators were able to include in their decision making process the views of an often-overlooked constituent group: parents.

PROCEDURES

Two forms of a Parent Visitation Survey were developed: one for the parents of male residents and one for the parents of female residents. (See Appendix A.) The forms were identical except for references to "your son" or "your daughter." In late April, 1970, 2,512 questionnaires were mailed to the parents of all residents who would not reach their twenty-first birthday during the 1970-71 academic year. Included with the questionnaire was an explanatory cover letter from the Dean of Housing Services and a prepaid return envelope. The letter described the visitation policy in force at that time and then detailed the policy which had been proposed for the forthcoming academic year. In essence, the proposed policy would remove all University imposed restrictions on visitation hours. The residents of each floor unit would determine the hours during which visitation would be permitted. (See Appendix B.)

One month after the questionnaire had been mailed, 1,410 usable responses had been returned. This represents 56% of the original sample and seems to be a fairly respectable response rate in view of the fact that no reminders were sent.

RESULTS

The first question asked parents if they had discussed the proposed visitation policy with their son or daughter. An affirmative response was given by 923 parents (67.1%), while 452 (32.9%) indicated that they had not discussed the proposed visitation policy.

The second question asked parents if they favored the proposed visitation policy. Table 1 below shows the response to this item and clearly suggests parental consensus in opposition to an expanded visitation policy.

Table 1

Parents' Responses to the Question, "Do you favor the proposed visitation policy?"

	N	%
Yes	445	32.0
No	901	65.0
No Opinion	41	3.0
	1,387	100.0

Parents who responded in favor of the proposed visitation policy were then asked to indicate possible reasons for having taken such a stand. Table 2 below shows the number of respondents who checked each of the potential reasons justifying a favorable attitude toward expanded visitation.

Table 2

Reasons Cited by Parents Favoring Expanded Visitation Policy

Reason		N
1.	My son/daughter is mature enough to handle this situation.	465*
2.	Most residents in the hall are mature enough to handle this situation.	255
3.	The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself impair my son/daughter's study habits.	383
4.	The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself infringe on my son/daughter's privacy.	311
5.	The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself encourage unacceptable behavior on the part of students in the residence hall.	291
6.	The proposed visitation policy would encourage growth and development in my son/daughter by making him/her responsible for important decisions governing his/her life.	322
7.	Other reasons	36

*Note: This is greater than the number favoring the proposed policy (445).

It is clear that those who favored the proposed visitation policy did so for the following reasons: their child is mature enough to handle the situation; the proposed visitation policy would not impair their study habits; the proposed policy would encourage growth and development through self-responsibility; the proposed policy would not infringe on privacy.

Parents who responded in opposition to the proposed visitation policy were asked to indicate possible reasons for having taken such a stand. Table 3 below shows the number of respondents who checked each of the potential reasons justifying an unfavorable attitude towards expanded visitation.

Table 3

Reasons Cited by Parents Not Favoring an Expanded Visitation Policy

Reason		N
1.	My son/daughter is not mature enough to handle this situation.	76
2.	My son/daughter is mature enough to handle such a situation but most other students are not.	221
3.	The proposed visitation policy would make effective study extremely difficult -- it would simply be too noisy.	719
4.	The proposed visitation policy would seriously infringe on my son/daughter's privacy.	644
5.	The proposed visitation policy may encourage unacceptable behavior on the part of students in the residence hall.	667
6.	Other reasons	129

Parents who opposed the expansion of visitation privileges cited as reasons the noise problem, the possibility of unacceptable behavior, and the infringement on privacy. These respondents tended not to express concern over the maturity of their son or daughter to handle the situation.

The third question asked parents to indicate the conditions under which they would allow their son or daughter to continue to live in the residence halls, assuming the adoption of an expanded visitation policy. Table 4 below indicates the responses to this question.

Table 4

Parents' Indication of Conditions Under which They Would Allow Their Son/Daughter to Continue to Live in the Residence Halls

Condition	N
1. I would have no reservations about letting my son/daughter continue to live in the residence halls under the proposed visitation policy.	501
2. I would permit my son/daughter to continue to live in the residence halls only if he/she had the option to move to a floor that did not elect 24 hour visitation.	568
3. I would permit my son/daughter to continue to live in the residence halls only if he/she had the option to change roommates in the event that conflicts arise over visitation.	690
4. I would not permit my son/daughter to continue to live in the residence halls if the proposed visitation policy is adopted.	127

The table shows that only 127 respondents, or 9% of those completing the questionnaire, would be categorically opposed to allowing their children to live in the halls under the conditions of the proposed visitation policy. The table shows, further, that 501 respondents, nearly 36% of those completing the questionnaire, would have no reservations about letting their son or daughter live in the halls under the proposed policy. Most parents would prefer to see the options of a change in floor and/or roommate in the event that the proposed policy was adopted.

By way of summary, it was found that nearly two-thirds of the responding parents opposed the proposed expansion of visitation privileges. At the same time, it was found that less than 10% of the responding parents would go so far as to refuse to allow their son or daughter to live in the halls under the proposed policy.

EPILOGUE

Having described the survey of parental attitudes on visitation -- including the underlying motivations for conducting the survey, the procedures employed, and the results obtained -- the presentation will conclude with a brief discussion of the events subsequent to the study.

Over the course of the summer, top administrators at UCLA had an opportunity to consider the elimination of restrictions on visitation hours. In their deliberations they had access to a number of sources of information including: the results of student surveys on visitation, a series of position papers by residence hall staff,

and the results of the survey of parents. The decision which resulted was to reject the proposed 24-hour visitation and to maintain the procedures which were already in existence.

This decision prompted a modified proposal, one which sought unrestricted visitation hours for persons 21 years of age or older and those students under 21 whose parents would give written consent. The rationale behind this proposal was that the University would not place a minor student in a position which his or her parent might find unacceptable. The modified proposal was accepted and has been in effect since the end of March, 1971. To date, more than 80% of the minor students have received parental consent.

Since the issue of visitation seemed to be of such importance to parents as well as students, it can be seen that the questionnaire approach was quite useful in the decision-making process. While it may be argued that the outcome of this study could have been predicted, it was nevertheless unknown what the parental response would actually be. Now we know.

REFERENCES

ACUHO Research and Information Committee. Student Housing Research: Survey of Undergraduate Student Visitation and Open House Policies. December, 1967.

ACUHO Research and Information Committee. Student Housing Research: Survey of Undergraduate Student Visitation and Open House Policies. July, 1968.

ACUHO Research and Information Committee. Student Housing Survey: Survey of Student Visitation Policies in Undergraduate Residence Halls. June, 1969.

ACUHO Research and Information Committee. Survey Regarding Room Visitation, Co-ed Halls, Closing Hours for Undergraduate Students in Residence Halls. September, 1970.

APPENDIX A

PARENT VISITATION SURVEY

1. Have you discussed the proposed visitation policy with your daughter?

☐ YES ☐ NO

2. Do you favor the proposed visitation policy?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NO OPINION

If you answered YES to question 2 please read the following statements and check as many as apply.

☐ A. My daughter is mature enough to handle this situation.

☐ B. Most residents in the hall are mature enough to handle this situation.

☐ C. The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself impair my daughter's study habits.

☐ D. The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself infringe on my daughter's privacy.

☐ E. The proposed visitation policy would not in and of itself encourage unacceptable behavior on the part of students in the residence hall.

☐ F. The proposed visitation policy would encourage growth and development in my daughter by making her responsible for important decisions governing her life.

☐ G. Other reasons (please explain).

2. continued.

If you answered NO to question 2 please read the following statements and check as many as apply.

☐ A. My daughter is not mature enough to handle this situation.

☐ B. My daughter is mature enough to handle such a situation, but most other students are not.

☐ C. The proposed visitation policy would make effective study extremely difficult -- it would simply be too noisy.

☐ D. The proposed visitation policy would seriously infringe on my daughter's privacy.

☐ E. The proposed visitation policy may encourage unacceptable behavior on the part of students in the residence hall.

☐ F. Other reasons (please explain).

3. If the proposed visitation policy is adopted, please indicate the conditions under which you would permit your daughter to continue to live in the UCLA residence halls.

☐ A. I would have no reservations about letting my daughter continue to live in the residence halls under the proposed visitation policy.

☐ B. I would permit my daughter to continue to live in the residence halls only if she had the option to move to a floor that did not elect 24 hour visitation.

3. continued.

☐ C. I would permit my daughter to continue to live in the residence halls only if she had the option to change roommates in the event that conflicts arise over visitation.

☐ D. I would not permit my daughter to continue to live in the residence halls if the proposed visitation policy is adopted.

Identification Information

Please check the appropriate boxes.

Your daughter is:

☐ 17
☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21

☐ Freshman
☐ Sophomore
☐ Junior
☐ Senior
☐ Graduate

APPENDIX B

Text of Explanatory Cover Letter

Dear Parent:

Through the decade of the 60's major colleges and universities throughout the United States have gradually disassociated themselves from the role of substitute parent for their students. The whole thrust of this movement has been to recognize the independence of the individual student in his relationship with the institution and to allow him to be responsible for his own actions. In other words, the institutions have tended to accept students as members of the adult community.

In general, students have responded well to the changes and have benefited from them. Court decisions have increasingly supported and expanded these changes as part of a student's rights. Parents, however, have not as often agreed.

At UCLA we are presently evaluating a student/staff proposal regarding residence hall life. We would like to have parents participate in the evaluation of this proposal, particularly in terms of how they believe it will affect their sons and daughters.

The proposal deals with "visitation" - the practice of allowing members of the opposite sex, at the invitation of a resident, to visit that resident in his or her dormitory room during approved hours. "Visitation" has been a part of the UCLA's residence hall program for many years, growing from four hours on a Sunday afternoon to the present policy of living group self-determination within parameters of noon to 10:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and noon to 2:00 a.m. on Friday and Saturday. Most living groups have voted the maximum allowable hours for themselves. Male visitors must be accompanied in the female quarters by their hostess.

The proposed policy would remove any University imposed parameters on hours. It would then become possible for a living group to establish "visitation" for 24 hours, seven days a week. That is, each floor unit would have the opportunity to select, by secret ballot, a visitation program of no hours restriction. This also means that the floor could select to terminate "visitation" at an early hour if it so desired.

It may be useful for you to know that two students are assigned to each of our residence hall rooms. Each room is furnished with two desks, two chairs, and two sofas that convert into beds. Thus, the room serves as a student's livingroom and study hall as well as his bedroom.

Now that you have some understanding of the environment, the present and proposed policies, we ask that you assist us in evaluating the proposal by answering the following questions with check marks in the appropriate boxes.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Associate Dean of Students